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Viewing cable 06TELAVIV145, PERES TELLS CODEL BAYH THAT OLMERT WILL BE NEXT

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| Reference ID | Created | Released | Classification | Origin |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 06TELAVIV145 | 2006-01-11 08:35 | 2011-08-30 01:44 | SECRET | Embassy Tel Aviv |

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"S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 000145

SIPDIS

CODEL

DEPARTMENT FOR H

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/11/2016

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SUBJECT: PERES TELLS CODEL BAYH THAT OLMERT WILL BE NEXT
PRIME MINISTER

Classified By: Political Counselor Norman H. Olsen. Reason 1.4 (B/D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: In a January 6 meeting, former Vice Premier Shimon Peres told Senator Evan Bayh, that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's chances of returning to political power are "nil," and that Alternate Prime Minister Ehud Olmert will be the next Prime Minister of Israel. Peres discussed the future of Kadima in positive terms, citing the need for such a new party to bring about peace. Peres said that he believes privatization of the economy can aid the peace process. He expressed pessimism about the outcome of the Palestinian elections, noting that he could not identify a strong Palestinian interlocutor for peace. Peres emphasized the need for the United States to stay the course in Iraq, but he predicted that having Shiite parties in power, together with a weak and divided Iraqi military apparatus, would support Iranian aspirations and terrorism in the region, and instability in Iraq. Peres also offered an analysis of the current situation inside Iran, which, he said, outlines the need for the U.S. and Europe to take a three-pronged strategic approach using political, psychological and economic pressures. Peres stressed internal vulnerability in Iran, based on Israeli analysis.
END SUMMARY.

Peres: You Need a Third Party to Make Peace

12. (C) Peres expressed regret that Sharon had lost his capacity to govern, and assessed that Sharon's chances of returning to political power are "nil." Kadima will still receive the largest number of votes in the March elections, he predicted, and Alternate PM Ehud Olmert will become the next prime minister. Peres asserted that Kadima's role in Israeli politics is essential to the peace process, adding that Kadima has filled a political "vacuum" brought about by the increasing radicalization of the right. Sharon's disengagement plan made Sharon a hero, "even in the eyes of Europe," but this same policy alienated Sharon from the far right, Peres said.

13. (C) Peres said that his personal agenda is to promote Israeli economic interests and companies abroad as a means to promote peace. He said that he believes this strategy has worked for the United States and China, and that it could do the same for Israel. He also said thriving private sectors are critical to moderating the Arab world. Peres highlighted his current book, "The Privatization of Peace," in which he lays out these concepts.

Dire Predictions for Palestinian Elections

14. (C) Peres was pessimistic about the January 25 Palestinian Legislative Council elections, estimating that the struggle between Hamas and Fatah, and within Fatah, will continue after elections. This internal struggle could potentially produce "something positive," Peres said, but added that, at present, a viable Palestinian interlocutor for peace does not exist. He characterized Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad -- not Israel -- as the greatest enemies of the Palestinian cause. Peres remarked, "When a cat is chasing a mouse, there is no chance the mouse will get a ceasefire."

Iraq: You Can't Leave a Patient in the Middle of Surgery

15. (C) Peres strongly emphasized the need for the United States to stay the course in Iraq, likening the situation in Iraq to a patient on a surgeon's table. "A surgeon cannot simply leave a patient in the middle of surgery," he said. According to Peres, the repercussions of leaving Iraq affect not only the United States and its partners, but also Arab countries with Sunni majorities that are vulnerable to terrorist attacks, such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

16. (S) The terrorists, Peres said, are Shiite Muslims who are infiltrating Iraq through the Iranian border and destabilizing the country. Peres suggested that the U.S. work more closely with the Iraqi military to learn their culture and language, and offered that Iraqis could learn American self-assurance on the battlefield. Senator Bayh agreed with this assessment, noting the additional challenge of an Iraqi army divided into Kurd, Shiite, and Sunni elements. Peres also cautioned that the methods the U.S. is pursuing in its push for democratic reforms have put majority Shiites in political power, and that "democratic processes do not always yield democratic results." Another Shiite country, Peres said, is what Iran wants.

Iran: An Israeli Intelligence Analysis

17. (S) Peres thanked Senator Bayh for his position on speaking out against Iran, but urged that the United States pay more attention to what is going on inside that country. Peres pointed to a lengthy profile of Iran produced by what he said was Israeli intelligence on the ground, using it to justify a three-pronged strategic approach -- political, psychological and economic -- toward the Iranian regime. Peres claimed that Iran's population has doubled to 72 million from 30 million since the first U.S. strike against Iraq in 1991 and has brought about a major increase in poverty and crime. He claimed that Tehran alone now has 900,000 prostitutes. Overall, he said Iran has 3 million drug addicts, 18 percent inflation, and 15-17 percent unemployment. Since the election of the new regime, Peres added, the stock exchange has dropped 30 percent. He claimed that some 200,000 Iranians, including some clerics, are leaving annually, that there are 100,000 anti-regime websites, in a variety of languages, and that the number of executions of journalists and dissidents is increasing.

18. (S) Peres assessed that a majority of Iranians support regime change and engagement with the West. He cited a June 9, 2005 poll, which shows that 70 percent of Iranians believe a U.S. presence in the Middle East increases the chances for

democracy in Iran. Peres acknowledged that the United States cannot achieve its objectives alone, noting that Iran will continue to "play" the international community unless the United States, Europe, and Russia show a unified front. Peres assessed that if Europe and the United States can agree on their political, psychological and economic approach toward Iran's regime, Russia will follow suit. Time is of the essence, he underlined, since Iran will complete R&D for its nuclear program "in a matter of months."

9. (S) Peres suggested a range of steps to implement his strategy on Iran. The United States could organize its Iranian diaspora population to help lead a human rights and freedom campaign against the Iranian regime, he suggested. The Iranian diaspora should understand that the international community is not criticizing Iran as a whole, Peres said, but rather the current Iranian regime and radical Islam. The U.N. Security Council could make demands of Iran that are not necessarily tied to its nuclear ambitions, Peres said; for instance, Peres continued, Israel would like to see Iran abandon its long-range missile program. It is essential, Peres added, that the international community push for a document outlining "punishment" for any Iranian use of nuclear weapons. Noting the statistics he had earlier highlighted on the Iranian economy, Peres assessed that economic sanctions could have a greater impact than imagined. Peres said that he believes this three-pronged approach will prevent the need for military action. He encouraged Senator Bayh to continue speaking out against the regime, but to equally state his support for the people of Iran.

10. (U) Senator Bayh's delegation cleared this cable.

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